

10 April 2026



Patricia Ruddy
Committee Assistant
State of Vermont House Agriculture Committee

Dear House Agriculture Committee Members:

On behalf of John Graham Housing & Services (JGHS) and the individuals and families we serve, I am writing with regard to S.323.

JGHS has a mission to provide emergency shelter, affordable housing, and essential services to individuals and families without a home or facing housing instability. The John Graham Shelter in Vergennes is the only emergency shelter in Addison County that shelters families with children, as well as individual adults. We also have a Food Shelf that serves our clients as well as any household in need in the community. We serve over 400 people annually at JGHS sites and in the community, including our shelter guests in Vergennes and affordable housing tenants living in six JGHS properties and other scattered sites across Addison County.

While the JGHS mission centers on shelter and housing, access to food is an essential component of our service delivery. The Food Shelf is stocked by Addison County farms that donate produce, meat, and dairy products, as well as HOPE, Vermonters Feeding Vermonters, and other community partners.

The provision in the original S.323 that counts the value of crop donations towards the threshold requirements for state farm support programs, which was removed by the House, is in fact an essential part of the Bill—simply because it enables more fresh food donations to non-profits. Donations from farms are essential to successful operation of our Food Shelf program and the health and wellbeing of low income and unhoused families in Addison County.

I'm sure you are aware that over 4,500 Vermonters were unhoused at our last count in June 2025 (Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont 2025), but you may not know that this number includes 1,041 children and 269 people 65 years old or older. In the John Graham Shelter, the percentage of JGHS clients aged 60 and over doubled from 2023 to 2024 (from 10% to 23%), as did the number of children (from 24% to 43%) (Community CareLink 2025). These vulnerable populations are especially in need of nutritionally balanced fresh food options, which is why farm donations are essential.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony and please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Susan Whitmore
Executive Director

John Graham Housing & Services

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